

Carlo Corsato and Deborah Howard (eds.), *Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari: Immagini di Devozione, Spazi della Fede / Devotional Spaces, Images of Piety*. Padua: Centro Studi Antoniani, 2015. xxviii + 324 pp. 128 plates. € 50. ISBN 978-8895908007 (pb).

This book is not, as one might expect, a book of art or architectural history, although these subjects receive ample attention on its pages. It is first and foremost a book that aims to approach its topic, the Venetian church of the Frari, as a ‘living organism’ (ix) whose history did not end at any one time and which continues to serve visitors and Venetians alike. Despite this – or perhaps rather *because of this* – it has much to offer those with an interest in the period of the Renaissance.

Based on a conference held in Venice in 2013 and consisting of twenty-four chapters by twenty-seven different authors, this is the closest to a monograph on Venice’s largest Franciscan church, and major landmark, that has ever been produced. At the same time it inevitably serves some topics and periods better than others. In their introductory chapter, Carlo Corsato and Deborah Howard outline their project’s ambition to study the church and the art, music and religious ritual it contained together in its manifold interactions and from a range of disciplinary perspectives. As such, it builds on the crucial work about the Frari by Rona Goffen and others. Corsato and Howard’s book coincides with the publication of a range of multi-authored, multidisciplinary projects about Venetian churches, the *Chiese di Venezia* series published by Marcianum Press, and it is perhaps to be regretted that theirs was not incorporated in this series.

After Napoleon’s invasion of Venice in 1797, and the subsequent suppression of the Franciscan monastery of the Frari, the church continued to exist at the centre of a flourishing parish. The book emphatically includes this latter part of the Frari’s history, in an attempt not to treat it as a fossil but as a still vital part of Venice’s religious and cultural life. Thus, a list is included with the names and dates of all guardians and parish priests from the foundation of the first church in 1281 up until the present day, and there are chapters on such topics as the nineteenth-century restoration of the choir screen, the stained-glass windows of the Cappella di San Marco that are partially twentieth-century, and a neo-Renaissance tomb monument from 1954. This emphasis on the *longue durée* may have been desired by the parish of the Frari, whose role in this project was crucial for the access to monuments and archives provided, as well as for the book’s photography. It is, however, also interesting for theoretical reasons. The study of Renaissance art and architecture are globalising, and as a result of this globalisation, the mobility of objects, their change of context and meaning, and their afterlives

are being foregrounded. While evidently focused on a very local case, Corsato and Howard's book can nevertheless be seen to address such wider themes.

In practice, this works out as follows. After two introductory chapters, the book consists of four parts, loosely organised around the themes 'Identity and Representation', 'Community and Confraternities', 'Memorialisation' and 'Art and Patronage'. The first part, in fact, includes chapters about a wide variety of topics, by Donal Cooper together with Marijana Kovačević, Lydia Hamlett, Maddalena Basso, Isabella Cecchini, Maria Antonella Bellin together with Patrizia Volpato, and Monica del Rio together with Giuseppe Saccà. In her chapter about the restoration of the marble choir screen, dating from the 1470s, Basso shows how, even when some argued for its removal as it had lost its function after the closure of the monastery, the careful procedures followed by those responsible ensured that the screen survived largely intact until this day. This was in a period when the painting the screen so spectacularly frames, Titian's high altarpiece of the *Assumption of the Virgin*, was not even on its original location: as Cecchini shows in her chapter, the years the painting spent in the Accademia (1816-1917) were crucial for its conservation and critical appreciation.

Part two is about 'Community and Confraternities' and includes, amongst others, a strong chapter by Martin Gaier about the Campo dei Frari, a space that, as the author shows, was the subject of a conflict going on for centuries between the frati minori and the Venetian government. This part furthermore contains a number of closely related chapters, by Massimo Bisson, Corsato, Jonathan Glixon, Cecchini and Iain Fenlon, about the confraternities in the Frari and their art, music and religious life.

Tomb monuments and their patrons are the theme of the third part, which contains chapters by Cristina Guarnieri, Silvia d'Ambrosio, Margaret Bent, Michel Hochmann and Vittorio Pajusco. In a very useful contribution, Hochmann connects the particularities of his material, namely the monuments for various members of the patrician Bernardo family, with wider critical questions about self-commemoration in Venice.

The book's fourth part, with chapters by Allison Sherman, Lorenzo Buonanno, Victoria Avery, Elena Frosio together with Valentina Sapienza, and Alessio Pasian, considers further examples of art and patronage. Buonanno analyses new visual evidence for Titian's involvement in the design of the frame of the high altarpiece, and Avery presents a reconstruction of Alessandro Vittoria's Zane altar as well as proposing a new chronology for its freestanding sculpture of *St Jerome*.

While individual parts of this book are useful to the specialist reader, taken as a whole this collective enterprise should also appeal to a wider audience of scholars and students

interested in Renaissance churches, religious life and the history of the *longue durée*. With chapters in English and Italian, each summarised in the other language, it aims for wide accessibility; accompanied by detailed indices, an extensive bibliography, and, above all, a large number of newly commissioned, high quality photographs, it will prove itself an important research tool.

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